From the Bishop’s Desk

“Ba Missioni Balelo Nifwe”

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, complements of the season.

Christmas is a festive season that draws our attention to “the coming of the Lord”; a season of gratitude for the Lord’s manifold salvific interventions in human history; a time of awareness of God’s continued saving presence; an intense period of preparation and waiting in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

We thank the Lord for all the graces we received during the Extraordinary Year of Mercy. As we open this new liturgical calendar, during which the Catholic Church in Zambia celebrates 125 years since the arrival of the first missionaries at Mambwe Mwela (1891) and nine years later (1900) at Lwali near Chibote mission. Let us give a fitting glory to the missionaries who planted the first seeds of faith that has gradually grown into the present day Mansa Diocese. Let us also pay tribute to the ancestors of our land for opening their hearts to receiving the Good News. It is now our turn to assume responsibility and be committed to the continued propagation of the Good News of Salvation, mercy, unity and embracing every one with Christ’s love.

Christ’s love is precisely the Vision we have set as a Diocese in the Strategic plan 2016-2021, entitled “Let down the nets for a catch” (Lk. 5:4) which was launched on December 12, 2015, and expressed in terms of a commitment to promotion of spiritual, moral education, health and general empowerment of the people in the diocese through evangelisation using well coordinated pastoral and integral human development programmes based on three thematic pillars, namely: Pastoral Care; Social Human Development; Financial Institutional capacity and Self sustainability. Thank you very much to all those who successfully realised the goals in their respective departments for the year 2016. Our general evaluation indicates that the Social and Human Development managed 75% of the planned activities, the Pastoral Care completed 54% while the Financial Institutional capacity and Self sustainability area realised only 15% of the planned activities.

We strongly urge the departments in the third pillar to assess their poor performance and ensure that set goals are realised. I also ask all diocesan departments, institutions and parishes to:

i. Familiarise themselves with the vision, Mission and Values of the Diocese
ii. Draw from the strategic plan activities which pertain to them and workout an implementation programme.
iii. Ensure that their own local plan realises and enhances the general orientation of the Diocese

The implementation of the strategic plan will be done in the context of celebrating 125 and 116 years of Catholic Faith in Zambia and Mansa Diocese, respectively. The missionaries did their part; today the ball is in our court, “We are the Missionaries of Today.” ‘Ba Missioni Balelo Nifwe’ is the theme I therefore propose to accompany the pastoral action of the Diocese with effect from Saturday 17 December, 2016 through to 25 November, 2017, during this period all parishes are expected to:

i. Set up programmes of missionary formation and catechetical lessons on the history of the Catholic Church in Zambia, in Mansa Diocese and in their respective Parishes.
ii. Enhance the faith and missionary spirit in the Youth and Holy Childhood.
iii. Display banners of the Pastoral Theme and recite the prayer at the beginning of every Eucharistic celebration
iv. Renovate and beautify the Church buildings and surroundings.
v. Organise pilgrimages at local or deanery levels to the shrines of Divine Mercy (Lubwe) and or Santa Maria wa Mwelu (Chibote) in honour of missionaries.

As we begin the festive season, let us all be united, repeating with one voice the refrain of the early Christian Community: “Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.” Let this be a year of life changing encounters with the Lord, deeper commitment to the vision, mission and values of our Diocese and indeed, a year of celebrating God’s Love and Mercy through the pioneer missionaries to our land. May we all pay heed to the Lord’s command to “Go therefore to the world and proclaim the Gospel to all creations” (Mk. 16:15), because “Ba Mishioni ba Lelo, Nifwe”.

I seek your prayers and wish each one of you the grace and peace of the Lord “so that you may have life in abundance” (Jn.10:10). May our blessed Mother accompany us on our journey of faith as a Diocese.

Bishop Patrick Chisanga, OFM Conv.
Bishop Chisanga has extolled Pope Francis as an example of people who walked the talk by doing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy during the Year of Mercy. Pope Francis, visited prisoners, differently abled people, the sick and Ex-Catholic Priests to mention but a few.

The Bishop told the faithful that whenever they made a pilgrimage to the Lubwe Shrine of Divine Mercy and/or the Holy Door of Mansa Cathedral, they received the grace of God. “As soon as you show contrition or remorse God completely pardons your sins. God’s mercy, unlike ours, does not record evil that has been done or keep scores of injustices experienced. God believes we can start anew and raise ourselves up”, said Bishop Chisanga when closing the Year of Mercy at Mansa Cathedral.

He decreed that the year of Mercy had ended but it had just began and reiterated that the year of mercy invited all to rediscover what is essential. This time, he said, Mercy calls us all to look and rediscover the beautiful face of the Church through the eyes of God. As you continue utilising the mercy of God, let mercy be embellished in your attitude so that the everlasting Mercy of God may always be with us. Continue performing the Spiritual and Corporal works of Mercy with the same emphasis as during the Jubilee Year.

The bishop recognised all those who adhered to the Year of Mercy in different parishes. “You had recollections, exposition of the Eucharist and Adoration; many of you came for confession and attended the Solemn Eucharistic Celebration. A good number of you had your marriages regularised. It was a wonderful moment in time” observed the Bishop.

Christ’s Kingship: a Scandal to Some—Bishop Chisanga

On November 20, 2016, during the Solemnity of Christ the King Sunday at the Cathedral of St. Mary’s of Assumption, in Mansa, Bishop Patrick Chisanga told the congregation that the Kingship of Christ Jesus is a scandal to those who are logical in thinking. He explained that the enthronement of Jesus was shameful and confusing to many. Instead of crowning Jesus with a Golden Crown, He was given a Crown of thorns; instead of putting on swaggering majestic Kingly clothes, He was naked; instead of making merry and receiving praises as King, at His enthronement, He was given bitter wine, humiliated and insulted upon. Calvary was His palace, on the Cross, on which was mockingly written: ‘Jesus King of the Jews’.

He further said that celebrating the Solemnity of Christ the King of the universe implied proclaiming the victory by which Jesus became King of every age, with the sole power of love, which is the nature of God. “As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ reigns in our hearts, minds, wills, and bodies. He is Lord of all things, on earth and in heaven. We, therefore, joyfully share the splendour of having Jesus as our King. His rule of Love transforms sin into grace, death into resurrection and fear into trust”, said the Bishop.

He further said, “God chose humiliation as a way to Kingship. Through Him, everything was made. In Him, God was King in the fullness of the Godhead. To believe in His Kingship is, therefore, a revelation from God’s will. The Son of Man draws all without discrimination and all bow before Him.

It would be therefore, meaningless if we believed in Jesus as King of the Universe but did not make him Lord of our lives. He ended by saying that our effort would be empty if we do not personally accept Jesus and His way of Kingship.

The Chapel of Perpetual Adoration Declared

"Exposition of the Eucharist and Adoration must continue, hence, the need to have a Chapel of Perpetual Adoration at the Cathedral of St. Mary’s Assumption. With these few words, I declare the Extraordinary Year of Mercy Closed in Mansa Diocese,” decreed Bishop Chisanga.

On 21st November 2016, Pope Francis signed a letter which calls all the Church to continue practicing mercy with the same intensity as during the Jubilee Year of Mercy.
The Pope has encouraged the faithful to spend time reflecting on what it was like for Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. He has asked to imagine “the path, the fatigue, but also the joy, the emotion and then anxiety of finding a place, the worry” and many other wonders the praying mind could see.

He urges us to contemplate the Nativity scene to keep focused on what Christmas is about. Focusing on the Nativity, he hoped, would enable us to realise what Christmas truly means, that it is Jesus coming close to us and being Immanuel, “God with us.”

He said: “The grace of Christmas is one of love, humility and tenderness. And he prayed that all of us would receive this grace “with openness and confidence in God.”

He focused on the figures of Mary and Joseph. Joseph had at first decided to divorce Mary quietly (because he did not want to cause a scandal and punish his betrothed) after finding out about her being pregnant. But he changes his mind and takes her as his wife after the angel Gabriel appeared to him in a dream, telling him not to fear—because Mary’s child is that of God the Holy Spirit.

In becoming man, said the Pope, “God draws near to the human being taking the flesh of a woman,” noting that God also draws near to us, but in a different way.

Francis explained that “Through His grace, God enters our lives and offers his own Son as a gift, and this, the Pope said, makes us ask ourselves: “What do we do? Do we welcome him, or reject him, kicking him out?”

The Pope said that just as Mary allowed God to “change the destiny of mankind” by opening herself freely to him, we must also try to seek Jesus and to follow his will every day. If we do this, we will be able to cooperate “in his plan of salvation for us and for the world.”

He said, “Mary appears to us, then, as a model to look to and support on whom we count in our search for God and in our commitment to building a civilisation of love.”

Of St. Joseph, Pope Francis said that as shown in the Gospel, on his own he couldn’t give comprehend and explain what he sees unfolding before him. But then, it is precisely in that moment that God draws near to him through the angel, revealing the true nature of Mary’s mysterious pregnancy.

Responding positively to God’s word, spoken to him through the angel, he no longer wants to “repudiate his bride, but takes her with him,” Pope Francis said, explaining that Joseph welcomed Mary with full knowledge and love for “he who in her was conceived by the marvelous work of God, for whom nothing is impossible.”

“Joseph, a humble and just man, teaches us to always trust in God, to let ourselves be guided by him with willing obedience,” said the Pope.

He concluded with the point that truly it is Mary and Joseph who introduce us “to the mystery of Christmas.” That “Mary helps us to put ourselves in an attitude of availability to welcome the Son of God in our concrete lives, in our flesh.”

And that “Joseph spurs us to always seek the will of God and to follow it with full trust.”

Source: The Manila Times
December has come and with it all the joys of Christmas. But why did God send his Son to this cruel world? Is Christmas about the gifts and cards we send and receive; parties with family and friends; lights in the windows; red and white stockings hanging in the living room; and shouts of "Merry Christmas" in the streets? If this is the case, then Christmas has become a time of sorrow and sadness. Many People today simply don't have the extra money to buy presents for their family, friends and relatives unlike during the Golden olden days. Gifts, Cards and Christmas parties have become shadow dreams. Many people are disappointed and saddened when they think of their loved ones who will not be able to come home for various reasons.

The fact is that Christmas is a season of great joy. It is a time of God showing His great love for us. It is a time of healing and renewed strength through the Sacrament of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. It is the time we celebrate the birth of the child Emmanuel. God sent Him into the world to be born. His birth brought great joy to the world. Shepherds, wise men, and angels all shared in the excitement. They knew this was no ordinary baby. The prophets had told of His coming hundreds of years before. The star stopped over Bethlehem just to mark the way for those who were looking for this special child.

Luke 2: 4-19 attests to this ... She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger; ... An angel of the Lord appeared ... and ... said ... “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

Christmas is about the sending of Jesus to bring salvation to all. What does Christmas really mean to us? As narrated by St. Luke, Emmanuel (God with us) is the reason for Christmas. Rejoice!

Today we can look at Christmas, in a new way, by inviting Him into our hearts. The joy and peace we will receive will last all year as we look to God for all our needs to be met. This will be a merry Christmas indeed. Let’s reconsider the way we celebrate Christmas.

To all Christians and people of God in Zambia, Merry Christmas!

We celebrate at Christmas the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the time when we celebrate God’s love which God the Father showed us by sending his son “to become the perfect sacrifice for sin” (Romans 8:3). Jesus was born like us yet he remained God as Scripture attests to this: “... born not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but God; the Word became flesh, he lived among us and we saw his glory.” (John 1:13-14). This demonstrates that God is able to love us despite our human frailty. He has glorified our humanity by becoming like one of us.

Christmas becomes such a time when we recall that moment in history when the incarnation took place. It is the time for us to celebrate, to rejoice because it marks the end of our journey of slavery to sin and the dawn of a new day of salvation.

The angel’s Christmas message to the shepherds: “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11), is also our message. It is the message of peace and life-giving. It is also the message of hope.

However, it is with great regret that Zambia lately has been experiencing situations that do not promote peace such as gender related violence despite the main interventions that have been put in place. Although indicators from the latest statistics show a marginal reduction, of about 14.5%, compared to the reported cases in 2015, there is no cause for celebration. Our Prayer as Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB) is to see that the gift of peace that Jesus brought at Christmas permeates all the spheres of human life especially the family.

We also want to urge all road users to exercise caution during this festive season. The Christian celebration should be that of life-giving and not a time to grieve for the loss of one life due to the recklessness on our roads. Christ came so that our lives can be preserved. “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10)”. The rainy season have started at a good note. We urge the government and those responsible officers to deliver all fanning input in good time so that the country continues to have sufficient food for our country’s food basket. Meanwhile, we urge the people whose livelihood is mainly dependent on fishing in the many water bodies that Zambia is blessed to adhere to the fishing ban as this is for the good of the country and the future.

In conclusion, as we celebrate Christmas this year, we want to praise God for the gift of his only begotten son. The festive season is also a time for family reunion. It is the time to celebrate together the birth of our Lord Jesus recalling he was born in a family of his mother Mary and Joseph his foster father.

As the Catholic Media Services and on behalf of ZCCB, we wish everyone in Zambia a truly blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year 2017. May the Celebrations of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace, renew your commitment to respond to God’s love in what you do and your plans for the year to come.

Fr. Winfield Kunda
ZCCB Communications Secretary
Edited by Fr. Lyoba Bernard
The diocese of Mansa is advocating for the sustainable use and management of the environment through awareness programmes in the province said Bishop Chisanga during the Mansa Diocese Ecological Day on Saturday 10 December 2016 at Caritas Mansa Centre. Addressing the gathering the bishop said that care for mother earth is an integral part of our mission of evangelisation and urged priests, in the Diocese of Mansa, to take the lead in the campaign of protecting God’s creation and the environment and reiterated that the Diocesan Environmental Day, set 3 years ago, is not in opposition with the world environmental day observed by the United Nations on June 5. The Diocese want to localise and raise awareness about the responsibility we have to care for our mother earth and the meaning of world environmental day by putting it with the onset of the rains in December. During this time we see pools of stagnant water, blocked drainages and fermenting garbage; we experience the danger of water bone diseases, and blown off roofs due to luck of wind breaks. We need to bring awareness about indiscriminate cutting of trees for charcoal and caterpillars; careless burning of bushes and plastic carrier bags; all these activities pollute the air we breathe and kill insects, reptiles, and marine life. How we treat the environment is a measure of our stewardship; a sign of our respect for the creator who entrusted it at our care. The humble contribution and initiative of the Diocese of Mansa towards this global campaign is to plant over 1000 trees and cleaning identified places every year.

On the same occasion Chief Kalasa Lukangaba revealed that his chiefdom has over the time discouraged the careless cutting of trees and embarked on the project of planting pine trees as a practical step to mitigate climate change.

Meanwhile Chilyapa Ward Councilor Chewe Ndila who was standing in for the Executive Mayor Mr. Chungu said that government is happy that Mansa Diocese is helping in the fight against factors which lead to climate change as government cannot manage alone.

Bishop Chisanga appoints Mr. Benjamin Chama and Sr. Evelyn Chisanga as Directors

Diocese of Mansa Bishop, Right Reverend Patrick Chisanga, has appointed Mr. Benjamin Chama and Sister Evelyn Chisanga (Salesian Sister) as Diocesan Education Secretary and Diocesan Pontifical Mission Society Directress, respectively. Bishop Chisanga, during the inauguration ceremony of the dual on December 9, 2016, explained that the Diocesan Strategic Plan leaves room for the creation of more parishes hence the need to give some responsibilities to lay people to avoid overloading priests with work. Mr. Chama who was until his appointment Diocesan Education Board Chairman said that he will try and see to it that the vulnerable access education through an established bursary system in catholic schools. Sr Evelyn Chisanga who has vast experience in different parishes and schools pledged to serve in her new positions whole heartedly with the help of God. She joined Mansa diocese, at Don Bosco Primary School, in January 2016.
Welcome to Mansa Diocese
Sr. Mapulanga Theresa LSMI has Joined Mary Immaculate Convent at St. Clement’s Secondary School.

Obituary
♦ Sr. Mary Kamwenda lost her mother on December 6, 2016 in Mfufulira. She was buried in Lubwe on December 9, 2016.
♦ Fr. Mathews Ngosa lost his father on 23rd December. Burial took place on Monday 26 2016

May the Souls of the Departed Rest in Peace

Enrolment of Health Workers brings with it new challenges

Mansa Diocese Health Coordinator, Sr. Delphine Kalisha (SOM) says regular meetings, in the Health Department are important for easy communication, efficiency and effectiveness. She said this when addressing Hospital Administrators from St. Joseph’s Lubwe Mission, St. Margaret’s Kasaba Mission and St. Paul’s Mission Hospitals.

In the meeting, the three mission hospitals were grateful that Government Grant, in the year 2016 was consistent and that Medical Stores had improved in the supply of drugs and other essentials to the hospitals.

It was learned that although the Zambian government elevated the status of St. Paul’s Mission Hospital to level II, in 2013, the need for more doctors and lecturers to meet the Hospital and ZEN-ZEM Nursing School statutory health requirements have not been addressed, yet.

There is need for more Doctors, and improved means of transport for the three Catholic Mission hospitals. For example, the government recommended number of doctors for Lubwe Mission Hospital is three but currently has none. It is using the doctor from Kasaba, leaving Kasaba with no doctor (The residential Doctor for Kasaba Hospital has moved to St Joseph’s Lubwe Mission Hospital).

However, the meeting observed that the new personnel that the Ministry of health is offering to mission hospitals has brought with it accommodation challenges.

Catholic Students Community (CASC) visits Mansa Diocese

About 55 Catholic University Community (CASC) members from the Copperbelt University (CBU), in Kitwe, visited Mansa Diocese from 19 to 26 November, 2016. Rt. Rev. Patrick Chisanga met them at the Cathedral Hall in Mansa on 21st October, 2016. He encouraged them to be prayerful and uphold their Catholic faith and advised them that, as future leaders, they are supposed to stick to things that bring in potential and meaningful outcomes. He also commended them for organising an Evangelising Tour to Mansa.

The chairperson for CASC, Mr. Patson Banda, explained that the purpose of their visit was to minister the Word of God to people in different groups and places in Mansa such as Correctional Centres, schools, Homes for vulnerable children, hospitals, churches, and give academic motivation to the youth. He thanked the Bishop for the warm welcome and for sharing the good news with them.

While in Mansa CASC members visited Mansa Correction Centre and the following parishes: Malaika Mikaeli, St. Francis of Assisi, John Paul II and Don Bosco.

St. Paul’s Holy Childhood have own ‘Church Council’

St. Paul’s Parish Priest in Kashikishi, Nchelenge District, Fr. Mukobekwa Davies has initiated a Church Council for Children that animates the spiritual and social programmes of the Holy Childhood at St. Paul’s. The children, between 5 and 13 years old, have been grouped into zones. Each zone has its own leaders who report to St. Paul’s Holy Childhood Church Council. The Council meets once in a month while zones meet twice a week. The children encourage one another through Bible sharing and games. Occasionally, Fr. Davies Mukobekwa narrates stories of Jesus in the New Testament and interesting stories of Kings, Prophets and the creation story in the Old Testament. Each zone is assigned a Sunday for 2nd special offering (Ukusengela) and singing during Children Mass.

Browsing to take place at Kacema Musuma Parish, Chipili

There will be jubilation on January 1, 2017, in Chipili, when 30 members of St. Ann lay movement will be browsed. This will be the first of its kind since the parish was created in February 2016. Kacema Musuma Parish is 80km from Mansa along Luwingu Road.
Generate resources for the Youth Ministry—Bishop Mulenga

Rt. Rev. Clement Mulenga, SDB, Bishop of Kabwe Diocese, has challenged Catholic youths to be productive, creative and generate resources for the youth ministry. He was speaking when he opened the National Council for Catholic Youth in Zambia annual general meeting in Lusaka on Friday, 25th November, 2016.

Making reference to how the youth ministry in the church is generally not financially supported compared to Holy Childhood, Bishop Mulenga said that some young people are very gifted and some are working for themselves but questioned how generous they are to the youth ministry.

The Bishop Mulenga challenged the youths to marry within the church and grow families and asked them to evangelise fellow youth. “We do not have time to relax, go out and spend your energies on your fellow young people,” he advised.

By Mwenny Mukuka CMS

On Saturday 10, December, 2016, Bishop Chisanga graced a fund raising Dinner dubbed ‘Church Mending’ at Kalebalika Spaita Centre. He told those who gathered that they have come together as a family of God that is sharing a common and urgent passion of renovating and bringing the Cathedral, the mother church of Mansa diocese, to accepted standards. “Cathedral is the Church of highest ranking in a diocese. By so doing we are paying tribute to pioneer missionaries who put such a beautiful structure in the Centre of Mansa district more than 60 years ago”, observed Bishop Chisanga. He further said that time has come for everyone to contribute and play a role so that the Cathedral shines out as the fitting central place of worship in Mansa district and the whole of Luapula province.

On behalf of the Bishop and the Cathedral Rector, the Church Mending Organizing Committee wishes to thank all members and people of good will for the turning up in numbers during the fundraising dinner held at Kalebalika Spaita Center on Saturday 10 December. The proceeds of this initiative will go towards the renovation of the Cathedral (floor, pews, walls, grounds, etc) as per Diocesan Strategic Plan and in view of celebrating 125 years of Catholic Evangelization in Zambia and 116 in Luapula. Thank you for your generous giving in cash, pledges and materials. Thanks also to those who are yet to give. Let us be a truly local self-supporting Church. Let Mansa Cathedral lead by example.”

By Mwenya Mukuka CMS

The Immaculate Conception: Celebrated on 8th December

It’s important to understand what the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is and what it is not. Some people think the term refers to Christ’s conception in Mary’s womb without the intervention of a human father; but that is the Virgin Birth. Others think the Immaculate Conception means Mary was conceived “by the power of the Holy Spirit,” in the way Jesus was, but that, too, is incorrect. The Immaculate Conception means that Mary, whose conception was brought about the normal way, was conceived without original sin or its stain—that’s what “immaculate” means: without stain. Mary was preserved from these defects by God’s grace; from the first instant of her existence she was in the state of sanctifying grace and was free from the corrupt nature original sin brings.

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By Mwenya Mukuka CMS

The Assumption: Celebrated on 15th December

The doctrine of the Assumption says that at the end of her life on earth Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven. It’s also necessary to keep in mind that the Assumption is not. Some people think Catholics believe Mary "ascended" into heaven. That’s not correct. Christ, by his own power, ascended into heaven. Mary was assumed or taken up into heaven by God. She didn’t do it under her own power.

The Church has never formally defined whether she died or not but the almost universal consensus is that she did die. Pope Pius XII, in Munificentissimus Deus (1950), defined that Mary, "after the completion of her earthly life" (note the silence regarding her death), "was assumed body and soul into the glory of heaven.”

Source: Catholic Answers

Sisters of Mercy (SOM) pose for a photo after following a retreat preached by Rt. Rev. Patrick Chisanga, Bishop of Mansa Diocese at the Novitiate House, in Mansa, from December 4-11, 2016

By Mwenya Mukuka CMS

CATHEDRAL CHURCH MENDING TAKES PLACE

The Cathedral is the Church of the Episcopal See where the bishop preaches, governs and pastors the local church.

Let the fruits of the fund raising be transparent and begin to show immediately. This will encourage others to contribute as well.

By Mwenya Mukuka CMS

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND ASSUMPTION

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Source: Catholic Answers
How the World Celebrates Christmas

The Monitor (Kampala), 23 December 2016

For many nations, Christmas day is crowned with decorating and lighting of Christmas trees, hanging of Advent wreaths, singing Christmas carols, Santa Claus, and Father Christmas visits, exchange of Christmas card greetings, and gifting. But much as there are a number of similarities in the way people around the globe celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, there are quite a number of traditions that differ from the rest. We have trawled the web to establish how Christmas is spent around the world.

Ethiopia and Eritrea
In these countries, Christmas holiday is celebrated on January 7 or Tahsas 27of the Ethiopian calendar. Christians in the two countries fast for 40 days (the fast of the prophets). They then head to church at dawn on Christmas morning were colourful musical celebrations which involve priests dressed in their best robes performing rituals, including dancing and playing drums and other instruments. In the afternoon, they dress in white and crown their day by playing a traditional game of Gena, a kind of hockey, said to have been played by the shepherds while they tended their flocks on the night that Jesus was born.

Assyrians
Assyrians, indigenous people of northwestern Iran, northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey fast from December 1 until Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve, families congregate outside their houses and hold lit candles while a child reads aloud the nativity story. Then they all sing psalms over a bonfire made of thorn bushes. If the thorns burn to ashes, the family will have good luck. Family members then jump three times over the ashes and make a wish.

On Christmas Day, while another bonfire burns in the churchyard, the bishops lead the service while carrying a figure of baby Jesus. He blesses one person with a touch. That person touches the next person and the touch passes around until all have felt the touch of peace. The fast is broken by eating traditional Assyrian foods such as pacha (boiled soup made of sheep or cow offal's and spices, as well as porridge made of ground wheat and chicken).

Southwest USA
The Southwestern United States includes Arizona, part of New Mexico. There are some special customs such as "farolitos" which are sacks partly filled with sand and then have a candle put in them. They are lit on Christmas Eve and are put on the edges of paths. They represent "lighting the way" somewhere for Mary and Joseph to stay.

Another modern twist on luminarias is to use colored bags, especially red and green. They are put on luminaria walks at public buildings, old cathedrals. People can walk around tens or hundreds of thousands of luminarias as a way to get into the Christmas spirit.

Vietnam
Here, Christmas is not a time to have dinner at home with family and show thanks for one another but rather a time to go out to the town, shop, and take pictures with friends in front of colourful displays, especially on Christmas Eve.

Lebanon
Lebanese families come together and butcher a sheep for a Christmas Eve feast, in honour of the birth of the shepherd Jesus Christ. On that night, the head of the house passes around a piece of coal representing the sins before Christ. After the piece of coal has been passed around it is then set on fire. After dinner, Christian Lebanese attend midnight mass.

Mexico
Mexican Christmas festivities start on December 12, with the feast of La Guadalupana (Virgin of Guadalupe), and end on January 6. Over nine days, groups of townspeople go from door to door in a fashion of when the parents of the unborn baby Jesus Christ looked for shelter to pass the night when they arrived at Bethlehem, and are periodically called inside homes to participate in the breaking of a candy-filled piñata. Pinata is made of clothes which is filled with sweets or toys or both and then opened as part of the celebrations.

Guatemala, South America
The Christmas traditions of Guatemala processions are performed for nine days with several religious statues taken around the plaza or town accompanied by loud drum beats and firecrackers.

Jamaica
Jamaicans' traditional celebration is referred to as Junkanoo or John, influenced by African ancestors. This celebration includes street dancing and a great parade through the streets with Jamaicans dressed in colourful masquerade costumes in which masks are worn.

Poland
On Christmas Eve, children watch the sky anxiously hoping to see the first star in the sky in remembrance of the Star of Bethlehem. After its appearance is declared, the family members sit down for dinner. Bits of hay are spread beneath the tablecloth as a reminder that Christ was born in a manger.

Did you know?
In China, 25 December is not a legal holiday although it is still designated as a public holiday in China's special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. Therefore, a few Christian citizens unofficially, and usually privately, observe the day. Also, Christmas is totally banned in North Korea, and South Koreans living near the demilitarised zones are not allowed to put an outdoor Christmas tree or decorations.

Mansa Roundup

Designated, set and distributed by Communications office

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